REFORMATION TODAY '75

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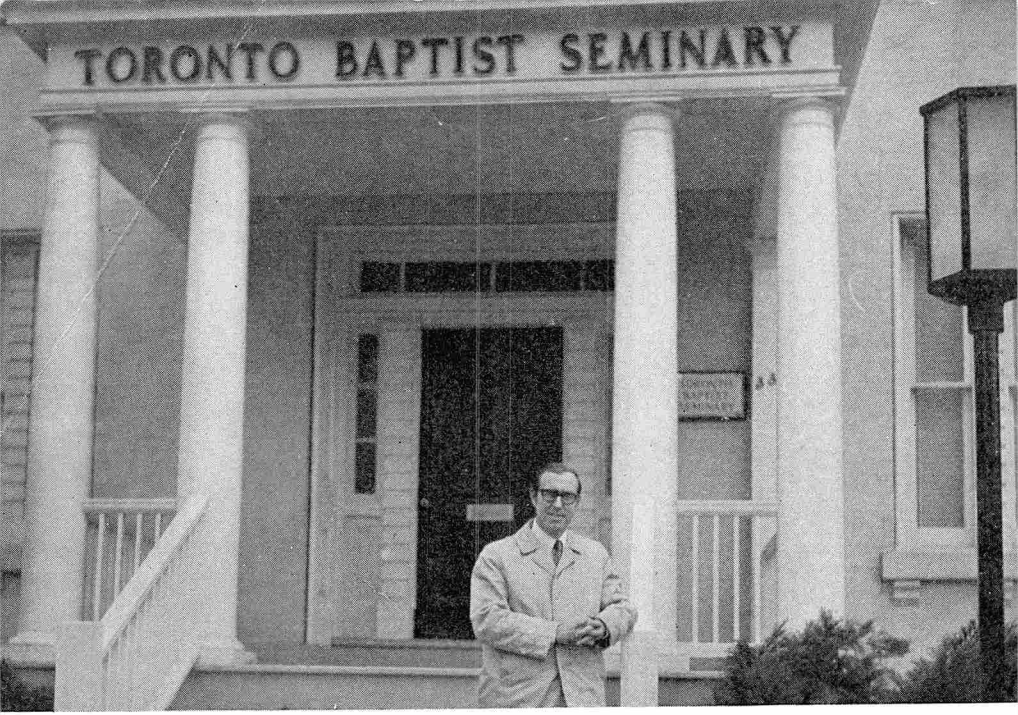

See opposite page for explanation of photos.

Editorial

THE CHURCH CONSTITUTION WHICH IS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR ADOPTION by several churches forms one of the major articles so far published by *Reformation Today*. Conditions vary considerably from country to country and it will be helpful to observe the reactions that may come from different areas. There are of course those who disdain all constitutions, creeds or confessions but such a position is not one to be commended. A study of church history furnishes copious evidence of the usefulness of such documents.

The articles that accompany the Constitution are complementary. Legalism is a danger to be avoided and we need to be clear about the place of the moral law in the Christian's life. Neil Richards explains the right use of the Ten Commandments. We also wish to avoid traditionalism, either by creating it ourselves or by way of being shackled with it. Herbert Carson's article, therefore, is timely as is the biography of Sinclair Thomson, a preacher who planted churches under difficult circumstances. We are witnessing the increase of such churches today which reminds us of the requirements of a constitution.

News from Canada

Pastor Leigh Powell of Toronto has been conducting a vigorous evangelistic visitation programme since planting a church in the heart of the city last year. The editor preached in this church last November and also spoke at ministers' fraternals and other gatherings arranged by the host church, Trinity Baptist, Burlington, led by Bill Payne. See photos.

Cover picture: Pastor Ron Edmonds of Long Beach, California, is featured with Joanne, one of the editor's daughters. Pastors Edmonds, Bill Downing, Jim MacDowell and Edsall Roberts are organising a Reformed Conference for the West Coast of the U.S.A. from July 19-26. This is to be a family conference and those interested should write to Pastor Edmonds.

Photographs: Pastor Bill Payne is shown opposite on the steps of the Toronto Baptist Seminary founded by the famous T. T. Shields of Jarvis Street Baptist Church. T. T. Shields was succeeded by Pastor H. C. Slade who died in 1974. Herbert Carson is due to spend two weeks in Toronto from January 5 and will preach at Jarvis Street. Pastor Peter Masters of Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, recently gave a series of lectures at the Seminary. Leigh Powell, who at the beginning of 1974 was responsible for the planting of a church in the centre of Toronto, is one of the tutors in the Seminary.

The group of men from left to right are: Leigh Powell, Roger Fellows (secretary of the Reformed ministers' fraternal in Toronto), Gordon Rumford, Max Latchford (standing) who is the *Reformation Today* agent for Canada, Eric Wright a missionary from Pakistan, Bill Payne and Alan Turner who left Dorset in England for Canada about a year ago.

Featured on the back inside cover are two Kenyan students of the Ontario Bible College where the editor gave an address on the primacy of preaching. There are four hundred and sixty students in the College, about a half being male students, one of whom is seen having a discussion with Bill Payne. Below from left to right: Roger Fellows, Bill Payne, Leigh Powell and Eric Wright.

The writer of this article which first appeared in the Evangelical Magazine of Wales was assistant minister at Grove Chapel, Camberwell, London, before becoming the minister of the Free Evangelical Church in Neath, Wales.

The Christian and the Moral Law

by Neil Richards

THE THEME OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY LIES AT THE HEART OF THE EVANGELICAL faith, and for this reason it has been a target of Satan's attack since the Apostolic era. I wish to bring these matters to your notice at this time for the following reasons:

1. There is a tendency among evangelicals to neglect and misunderstand the law of God; to create a tension or opposition between law and gospel; to see no use for the law and to maintain that it has no relevance to the believer. This has happened before in the history of the Church with disastrous consequences.

2. A right view of the law is essential to a true understanding of the work of Christ—his life, his cross and his atonement. Wrong views of the law will lead to wrong views of the gospel.

3. The alarming state of our society with its increasing lawlessness. This generation has little or no concept of moral absolutes, or of moral obligation to God as Creator and Judge of all the earth. The consciences of men are therefore becoming hardened and insensitive.

For these reasons I would draw your attention to the law of God, that we may have a truly Christian view of it.

The Harmony of the Law and the Gospel

The law and the gospel are distinct and different, but they are not enemies. The law is only an enemy of the gospel when it is *abused.* Whenever men

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Inflation and the cost of subscriptions

With this issue the sixth year of publication commences. We acknowledge with warm gratitude the support of our subscribers, many of whom have sent donations enabling the continuation of the magazine. The cost increasingly exceeds the subscription charge and therefore with reluctance a rise in these charges must be anticipated.

try to make the law a ladder to heaven, then law and gospel are opposed. Whenever the law is conceived as contributing in the least degree towards our acceptance with God, then the gospel of grace is *nullified.* But when the law is rightly viewed and correctly used, law and gospel work together:

(a) Both proceed from God: he is the source of law and gospel. God never contradicts himself. Therefore law and gospel serve the same ultimate end—the glory of God in the salvation of sinners, 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good' (Rom. 7:12). Of course it is! It comes from God; it displays his righteousness and holiness.

(b) Grace causes the sinner to love both. Both are loved or hated together. The believer loves the gospel because, pre-eminently, it displays God's mercy: he loves the law because it displays God's holiness. 'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man' (Rom. 7:22).

There is, therefore, a harmony and agreement between law and gospel.

The Law as a Preparation for the Gospel

How are sinful men to be brought to see their need of the gospel? The Scripture replies: by the work of the law upon the conscience. 'For by the law is the knowledge of sin' (Rom. 3:20). Men are blind to the true nature of sin until the Holy Ghost takes the law of God and displays the *exceeding sinfulness of sin.* Thus the law prepares the way for the gospel: 'the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ' (Gal. 3: 24). Martin Luther puts it like this: 'The law must be laid upon those who are to be justified, that they might be shut up in the prison thereof, until the righteousness of faith come—that, when they are cast down and humbled by the law, they should fly to Christ. The law humbles them not to their destruction, but to their salvation. For God woundeth that he might heal again; he killeth that he might make alive.' The Apostle Paul bears eloquent testimony to this in Romans 7: 7-11. He tells us that he was 'alive without the law once'—content and undisturbed, satisfied that he had kept the law. Then God brought the tenth commandment, 'Thou shalt not covet', to bear upon him with convicting power, and Paul saw the *spiritual intent of the law*—that it judged the thoughts and intents of the heart. He saw within him a well of iniquity that had been covered up by his outward garb of respectability—'sin . . . wrought in me all manner of concupiscence'—and the law did its killing, slaying work, and so prepared the way for the gospel.

The law exhibits the righteousness of God. It shows us what kind of righteousness alone is acceptable with God, and that we by nature are devoid of such righteousness. So the law becomes the 'ministration of death' (2 Cor. 3: 7). Where grace is absent, the law can only convict and slay. God lays siege to men's hearts by the law, so that the false peace

and tranquillity into which Satan has lulled them are broken, and their conscience begins to labour and be heavy laden. Thus the words of Christ, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11: 28), are made by the Holy Ghost to be sweet and acceptable to us.

Therefore the law must he *preached,* and preached evangelically so as to lead men to Christ and to justification through his blood. Men's hearts must be ploughed and harrowed by the law, that the seed of the gospel may take good root.

The Gospel Establishes the Law

God's way of salvation honours and upholds the law. 'Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law' (Rom. 3: 31). Likewise our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law . . . I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil' (Matt. 5: 17). The gospel establishes the law in two ways:

(a) By Christ's life and atonement

Nothing could be clearer than that Christ honoured the law. He kept it in every detail. He placed himself under the law—he was 'made of a woman, made under the law' (Gal. 4: 4). He who made the law put himself under the law *for our sakes.*

We are debtors to the law. We owe to the law a perfect obedience which because of sin we are utterly unable to give. But God in his great love and mercy provided us with One who would keep the law for us, as our Mediator and Representative. This Christ did: he rendered to the law a full obedience in our place. He satisfied its every demand for us.

Our Saviour established the law not only by his active obedience to its precepts, but also by his passive endurance of its full penalty against sin. On the cross he stood in our place, and bore the full penalty of the law against us: 'he was wounded for our transgressions . . . bruised for our iniquities' (Isa. 53: 5). He was 'made a curse for us' (Gal. 3: 13). He drank the cup of wrath which was *our* due. He met in full every demand of the law against us, so the believer can cry with Paul: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8: 1).

"The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view."

Such a truth, when brought with power to the sinner's heart, causes the lame to leap for joy, the dumb to sing and the dead to rise to newness of

life. This is the foundation of the evangelical doctrine of justification. God not only blots out our sins for Christ's sake, but bestows upon us the righteousness of Christ. In this sense the gospel offers more than forgiveness! God not only removes our filthy rags, but he clothes us with a spotless robe.

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress."

The righteousness has nothing to do with our works: it is the righteousness of God. God imputes it to us; he reckons us as righteous for Christ's sake. He takes our debts and puts them to Christ's account, and counts Christ's obedience and death to our account. This is the solid bed-rock of evangelical religion—what Luther called "The article of a standing or falling church". It is the believer's joy in life and solid confidence in death: "Christ . . . is made unto us . . . righteousness" (1 Cor. 1: 30).

(b) By the work of sanctification in the believer

The Christian has been freed from the law, that is, from its condemnation and curse. The law is no longer a dread voice accusing and condemning. Christ has quenched Mount Sinai's flame. How then is the Christian related to the law? He is a *free bondservant.* This is one of the paradoxes of the Christian life. The believer, freed from sin and from the law, becomes the bondslave of Jesus Christ his great liberator—and this willingly, joyfully and wholeheartedly. We are Christ's freemen because he has redeemed us from sin and the curse of the law: we are Christ's bondslaves because he has purchased us for himself. Just as the Hebrew slave, freed after six years, but wishing to continue in his master's service, says: "I love my master . . . I will not go out free" (Ex. 21: 5), has his ear pierced and abides for ever a free slave in his master's house, so the believer has his ear pierced—he is the *free* bondservant of Jesus Christ. God not only changes our legal standing before the law: He also changes our attitude and disposition towards it. By the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost He removes the darkness, enmity and root of rebellion, and causes the believer to love Christ, and his word and commands. So when the believer keeps Christ's commands and does the will of God he is doing what, in his heart of hearts, he most wants to do. Therefore Christ's service is *perfect freedom.* How does the Christian view God's law? He delights in it! He meditates upon it. He longs more and more to keep it, and sorrows most over his failure to do so. "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7: 22). The power and strength to keep the law flow not from the law itself but from Christ. All is of grace. "Christ . . . is made unto us . . . sanctification" (1 Cor. 1: 30).

Two Common Objections

"If we love God, surely we do not need His law?" But Christ says, "If ye love me, *keep my commandments*" (John 14: 15). Love is the Christian's

inward motive: God's law is his directive. As someone has put it, "Law is love's eyes, and without it love is blind."

"If we have the Holy Spirit in us, surely we do not need the law?—the Spirit will guide us". But how does the Spirit chiefly guide us?—through the Word of God. The history of the Church is strewn with the wrecks of people who professed to love Christ and be led by the Spirit, but who neglected the word and commandments of God.

Two Recurring Dangers

To conclude, let me mention two dangers that have always confronted the Christian Church at this point: the twin perils of *legalism* and of *licence* to sin. The Christian must sail his vessel between the rock and the whirlpool. He is ever in danger of going back under the law; of his obedience becoming "legal" and not "evangelical"; of regarding his obedience as contributing in some degree (however small) to his acceptance with God. This was the problem of the Galatian church. Such a defection from the gospel, if pursued, constitutes the gravest apostasy, and can only end in disaster for those concerned. From the beginning to the end of our Christian lives we have only one plea before God—Christ our Righteousness.

The other danger is equally acute—that of presuming on the mercy of God and of making God's grace an excuse to sin. Jude speaks of those who "pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness" (verse 4). It is no infringement of our liberty in Christ to be tied to the performance of duty. It is the great end of our freedom and redemption that we may serve God. We need the law to instruct our consciences, to exhort us, to humble us, that we may fly continually to Christ for pardon and grace, and from him draw all our help and comfort. Let me put it like this: we always need to be reminding ourselves of whose we are and whom we serve; of our glorious redemption in Christ; that we have been reconciled to God by the blood of his cross; that we have been adopted into his family; that ours is the "glorious liberty of the children of God". God sees us "in Christ", and we are "accepted in the beloved". All that the law has to say to us it says without infringing any of these privileges. The obedience which the believer renders to the law he renders as a child of God out of love to his heavenly Father. As a redeemed sinner hidden in the Saviour's side he obeys out of heartfelt gratitude and thankfulness to a loving God. To maintain this evangelical view of the law involves that sweet daily discipline of "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith". The more clearly we have him in view, the more his commandments will become our delight.

May God help us and give us grace in these things.

Soli Deo Gloria!

dition" will itself help us to underline the difference d of God and the word of man. Tradition simply means nded on". Sometimes it can refer to something which For example, a church may have a great preaching tra- as been handed on from generation to generation the the whole counsel of God should be declared. Or a e a fine missionary tradition. The word "tradition" is t can refer to something good which is handed on, or to vhich is handed on. The word is used in the New Testa- vith reference to the tradition of the elders, in the sense elders, a tradition which Jesus castigated, but it is also the tradition of the apostles.

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THAT APOSTOLIC TRADITION IS A STRANGE WAY OF /ord of God. It would seem to introduce a thoroughly The apostle Paul, however, uses the term in 1 Corinthians 15. He uses the cognate verb to describe precisely what mparting to them the Word of God. When he is talking Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 he says: "For I have received t which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus in which he was betrayed took bread . . ." and so he itution of the Lord's Supper.

s is equivalent to this word "tradition"—"I delivered", "I handed over to you". Again, in 1 Corinthians 15, when he outlines the elements of the Gospel, he uses the same verb and the same thought—"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures". In both places Paul is speaking of something which he has received from the Lord and handed on—the apostolic tradition. This leads us to look

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at the role of the apostles in the handing over of the apostolic tradition from the Lord to the churches.

When we begin to read the Acts of the Apostles we are struck by the action taken right at the outset to replace Judas, who had betrayed the Lord and forfeited his position in the apostolic circles, with another man. Two men were set before the apostles. Prayer was made and the lot cast which fell upon Matthias who was then numbered with the twelve. It was not some sentimental consideration that moved the apostles to choose another. These men were the foundation members of the new Israel of God, the foundation members of the church of the New Covenant. So, under God, they chose another to make up again this unique group, the group of the twelve. However, the apostle Paul seems to be number thirteen. He seems to upset the symbolism. He fully appreciated this fact and emphasised that there was something unusual about his apostleship. He said: "And last of all he was seen of me as one born out of due time".

The word used is the word which means "an abortion". He was an unusual addition to the apostolic group. He had the prime qualification, in that he was a witness of the resurrection, for the experience the apostle Paul had on the Damascus road was not some kind of vision or ecstasy. He claims quite emphatically (1 Cor. 15) that he saw the risen Lord as really as the other brethren had seen him after his resurrection from the dead. That was the qualification that was demanded when Matthias was added to the twelve.

When we turn to Galatians we find this being reinforced in the first chapter. Paul is quite clear that he is not a subsidiary apostle. He is not inferior to those who were reputed to be the chief of the apostles. So he emphasises very vigorously in Galatians chapter 1 that his commission does not come from man, nor from the church, but directly from God. "Paul an apostle . . . *by Jesus Christ.*" The basis of Paul's apostolic ministry was that he had been chosen by God, separated unto the Gospel, and singled out by God's special choice for a great ministry. Thus he shared with the twelve a unique function in the area of revelation, handing on, as they did, that which he received from the Lord, namely the apostolic tradition. When the Lord said to his disciples, speaking of the Holy Spirit, "He will guide you into all truth", this was a promise concerning the revelation which, under God, they were to receive and to declare, and which was to be the basic Word of the Gospel to the Church. The apostles were the foundation members in the sense that upon their testimony the Church was built. I believe that is the way we should understand Matthew, chapter 16. There has been much discussion and debate about this passage, and many people have used so

much energy in refuting the false claims of Rome that they have run out of steam by the time it comes to positive interpretation! Our aim is not only to remove what is erroneous, but also to discover what God is saying in his Word. What did the Lord mean when he said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"? Obviously there was a play upon the word Peter, the rock, and there was a great deal of discussion in the early church as to who or what was "the rock". However, I believe that the varying interpretations tend to converge. It was not Peter as a particular person who was the Church's foundation, but it was Peter in the act of making his confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. In the act of confessing the deity and lordship of Christ, Peter received this word from the Lord. It is on the apostolic testimony that the Lord builds his Church. When the preaching of the Gospel after Pentecost reaped such a rich harvest, men and women were baptised and "continued in the apostles' doctrine". It was the apostolic testimony which led them to repentance, faith and baptism, through Peter's preaching, and led them into fellowship with God's people. The New Testament is this apostolic testimony in permanent written form.

In the early Church there was considerable debate about what constituted Scripture. The extraordinary thing, to my mind, was that there was not more debate. There was eventually an overwhelming consensus on the question of what constituted Scripture. One can understand the reason for some uncertainty. The New Testament did not arrive as a book dropped from the skies, it arrived piecemeal. Paul saw a situation existing in Corinth and therefore he wrote a letter to the church there. Other epistles appeared in a similar way. We can appreciate that in the days before jet travel, telephones or rapid post, there would be churches which had a limited selection of these epistles. It was only gradually that the churches at large had the complete writings which we know as the New Testament. Consequently, there was ground for a certain amount of discussion and particularly because other writings were also circulating, writings which bore honoured names like that of Barnabas. How were they to distinguish between those which were authentic writings and those which were not? The criteria which they applied were, "Are these writings apostolic?" "Do they come from the apostolic circle?" "Do they bear the stamp of the Apostolic testimony?" "Do they come from the men who knew Jesus?" It may be objected that these criteria were not applied in the case of Mark's Gospel. Reading from Church history, however, we discover that behind Mark's testimony is the testimony of Peter.

Peter's second epistle speaks about the emergence of Scripture—"holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost". Peter puts also Paul's writings on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures

(2 Pet. 3:16). Paul, Peter, James, Jeremiah and others spoke because they were impelled, driven forward by God the Holy Spirit. Their word was God-breathed, to use the vivid expression that Paul uses when he is writing to Timothy: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"—literally, God-breathed. The word translated "breath" is also the word for "the Spirit". All Scripture is the product of the resurrection which the Apostles so taught and uniquely inspired them that they became the mouthpiece of the most High to give to the Church of Christ that testimony which was to be her Gospel and her strength.

There are certain implications which flow from these two facts—the selection of the apostles and the uniqueness of their role on the one hand and on the other the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in selecting, training, equipping and leading them as they wrote the Scriptures.

The implications are these:—

1. *The revelation is complete*

The apostles by definition could not have successors. They alone were eye witnesses of the resurrection. The finality of the apostolic office as witnesses of the resurrection means that the testimony they bore is the complete and final testimony. When John is drawing near the end of his Gospel he thinks of all that he has seen Jesus of Nazareth doing, and all that he heard him saying. He concludes: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30). There was a possibility of recording many other events and miracles, but under the direction of the Spirit he recorded these and these only. There is a sufficiency; we do not need further revelations.

2. *The Spirit illuminates*

This is an inference from the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. The apostles were chosen to be the instruments to convey to us the testimony. It was the Spirit who chose and equipped them. The Spirit who decisively gave the revelation through the apostolic testimony is the same Spirit who continues to give illumination and understanding to God's people to appreciate and understand the meaning of the revelation. There has been a great deal of confusion between revelation and illumination, between that which God did once for all in the apostolic testimony and that which the Spirit continues to do in enlightening men of God to understand the Scriptures, and to apply them. The thinking of Karl Barth is one example of dangerous confusion. He has popularised the idea that only as the Spirit illuminates the Scriptures do they become the Word of God.

Objective revelation is submerged and becomes subjective illumination. This emphasis has been carried into some sectors of evangelicalism.

3. *Scripture is a unity*

Our interpretation is governed by our submission to the sovereignty of the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Spirit of order. The Spirit does not contradict himself, nor speak with a stammer; the Spirit does not adjust his thinking as he goes along. From Genesis to Revelation he makes one consistent disclosure of God and of God's purposes in salvation. Therefore, in our attempt to understand and interpret Scripture we dare not select and pull out one part and then use our traditional scheme of interpretation to fit it into our pattern. We must endeavour to submit ourselves to the whole of the Word of God in subjection to God the Spirit.

Why, then, do different people come to different conclusions? I believe we find the answer again in this realm of the working of the Spirit. He does not work in terms of the automatic adjustment of our thinking so that we become good interpreters of the Word of God. He is the Holy Spirit, who demands holiness of life. Our tragedy is that this side of glory we are all sinners, even though we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. There is still much darkness in our understanding, which often renders us incapable of fully appreciating the leading of the Spirit. Our spiritual ears are so dull through constant listening to the sounds of the world and the opinions of men that we are not sensitive to the Spirit's speaking to us. However, as, by God's grace, we advance in holiness, as we submit to the direction of God the Spirit, so he leads us forward in our understanding of the truth; but never by giving a new revelation.

Church Tradition

When tradition is mentioned in this context, at once people think of the Church of Rome. Indeed, they are so busy thinking about Rome and its tradition that they are blind to the fact that they may be as entrenched in tradition as any Roman Catholic. Rome certainly is a powerful demonstration of where traditionalism leads. During the Middle Ages we see Roman tradition developing. Teaching which is ostensibly an interpretation of Scripture begins the process, but the development is the same as we see in Mark 7 where the Lord points out that the tradition has become equal with the law. In fact it has become superior to the law so that it dominates the law; indeed it makes void the law. During the Middle Ages tradition moved on to a level with Scripture so that in the decrees of the Council of Trent there are two sources of revelation, Scripture and tradition, both of them being subject to the infallible teaching and authority of the church.

At the time of the Reformation one of the great slogans of the Reformers was *Sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone! Martin Luther had been brought to Christ through *Sola Scriptura.* He found peace of soul, by God's

grace, in the epistle to the Romans. Alas, the Reformers did not carry out to a proper conclusion their own initial premise. The English Reformers, for instance, stood solidly with the continental Reformers on the supremacy of Scripture, as seen in Article 6 of the 39 Articles. Yet at the very same time the Anglican Reformers were developing unbiblical traditions. No man may officiate in the Church of England unless he is episcopally ordained—this is one example where a tradition has become equal with Scripture and is imposed. Free Church men are often in as much bondage as any Roman or Anglican, as far as the order of service is concerned. It is the boast of Free Churchmen that they are not tied to a Prayer Book, they do not have set prayers. However, in their services there is slavish adherence to a set pattern—always the same point at which the hymn is given, always the same point when the prayer is offered. Where is the freedom with which Christ has made us free? There can be a Free Church Liturgy which is as rigid as any Book of Common Prayer!

In the realm of conduct, what I find interesting is how cultural and national considerations affect Christians in their understanding of what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad conduct. Our trouble is that so often we think we are carrying out biblical patterns of conduct when in actual fact we are simply conforming to a pattern which we have received.

Then there is the realm of the ministry. Here ministers are both the villains and the victims. They have traditions which they maintain while other traditions are forced upon them. For example, there has grown up a tradition in which a minister will dress in a certain way, and in some circles there is a tradition of speaking in a peculiar tone of voice. The ecclesiastical tone of the Free Church minister, although different from the Anglican voice, is sometimes very evident. People are so concerned with patterns of conduct, with what is outward, that they will deny the liberty of the children of God.

Concerning clerical dress I confess that I was surprised to read about John Owen, the great Puritan, who I always imagined to be a very austere figure. Then I discovered to my amazement that John Owen was one of the trendy figures of 17th century Oxford! The students commented that "he had enough powder in his hair to fire a cannon"! He wore buckles on his shoes, he wore bows at his knees. In fact he was very much the *avant garde* of Oxford men. It was not just that Owen enjoyed that kind of dress (he obviously did or he would not have worn it), he was in a sense making a dual protest. He was protesting on the one side against Anglicanism with its emphasis on vestments and on the other side against the austere English Puritan Presbyterians with their black sombre attire. He was demonstrating that the Christian man has been set free by the Spirit and is not to be in bondage to any fashion, whether it be the fashion of the world or of some reformed tradition.

Some people have a mistaken idea of what it means to be conservative in theology. We are called to be conservative in the sense that we stand for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. We are absolutely unyielding in our insistence that truth must be maintained. There are, however, Christians who think that to become conservative in one's attitude to Scripture means to become rigidly conservative in every other realm of life. The Roman Catholic Church is a commentary on what happens when that kind of conservatism prevails. The Vulgate began as a translation for the common people, but it remained the translation even when the common people could no longer understand a word of it and Rome would not countenance a new translation. After all, it was hallowed by past usage! The early Puritans at the beginning of the 17th century took precisely the same position over the Geneva Bible. In fact they would not touch the Authorised Version when it appeared. One of them said it was full of atheism and popery! There have been traditionalists in all centuries—people who cling to what is past and will not budge.

Our calling is to preserve the apostolic tradition in all its glorious fulness but to be willing to shed human traditions, especially those which begin to be venerated and become an obstacle to the free course of the Word of God.

The fascinating story of Sinclair Thomson is told by Ian Randall.

Thomson—Could it Happen Today?

AN OLD MAN OF EIGHTY YEARS OF AGE SET OUT ON FOOT FROM SPIGGIE, IN the Shetland Islands, to start a fifty mile preaching tour. Today this area is becoming famous for oil discoveries and could become a centre of modern industry, In 1864 little was modern and the old man was used to many days of walking. He had preached nearly 6,000 times in these islands, and though he did not know it, this was his last tour. Sinclair Thomson was nearing the end of a life of labour. With good reason was he known as the Apostle of Shetland. He had been used to plant six Baptist churches in different parts of the islands, having himself been the first person ever to be immersed as a believer in Shetland. He became a convinced Baptist before he knew that there were others in the world who believed what he had come to see as the teaching of the New Testament on the subject of baptism. As he walked, Thomson had time to reflect,

no doubt, on his life: the fascinating chain of circumstances leading to his conversion; and the preaching work which followed—all begun through the discovery of a book on the frequency of communion.

Conversion

We turn back now to the year 1809, the year of his conversion. Thomson with two friends was making his way to the local Parish church. Presbyterianism was the national religion in Shetland, as in Scotland as a whole. But in Shetland, evangelical truth was rarely to be heard. Unregenerate men filled the offices of the church. Thomson himself was a precentor—he led the singing at the services—but saw nothing incongruous in the fact that he also made a good deal of money on the side through the smuggling business! His duty at the church on one particular day was to announce a wedding. It was a hot morning and on the way he stopped at a cottage for a drink. The lady of the house turned out to be a member of the Independent Church in Lerwick—the only such church in the islands. Thomson's reaction is interesting. "It is very wrong", he said, "to leave the Kirk and run after folk of this kind". Though unregenerate, and a leader at all the local dances where he played the violin, he was a great supporter of the Established Church.

Unlike his two companions, Thomson felt he would like to talk with this woman at greater length, and called again. His main object was to reclaim her from her "schism" and for some time he harangued her, becoming increasingly irritated at the woman's failure to take up his argument. Finally he gave up, but before he left he asked if he could take with him the book she had been reading. All books were precious to him. As a lad—he was now twenty-five—he had shown keen interest in learning to read and write. But difficulties overcame this bent. His parents were poor crofters, eking out a living from the land and from fishing, as was the case with most of the families around. Therefore he could hardly be spared from the work at home to go to school. Besides, school was a long distance away. At the age of seventeen Sinclair had gone off to a whaling station in the Arctic where he stayed for three years. After that he married and settled down with a place of his own. Hard work was needed to survive. Yet still the urge to learn had not left him. It was with anticipation that he began to read about the unusual subject of the frequency of communion.

In the Kirk communion was held four times a year. It was an occasion which was tied up in superstition. The Independent churches argued that the Lord's supper should be a simple service observed every Sunday if possible. Thomson was, of course, convinced that the Independents were horribly mistaken, but as he began to read he found he could not refute what the book said. It may seem strange that a man whose life

was ungodly should be interested enough to read more than a page or two of a book like this. In fact Sinclair, as a boy, had learned many Psalms and Paraphrases by heart. When he became a member of the Kirk, he was singled out as one who was outstanding in his knowledge. He believed all that was said from the pulpit. It was all superficial assent, without any gracious work in the heart, but it does illustrate the way in which God in his providence prepares the way, in the elect, for the receiving of the truth. A foundation had been laid which would be of use to Sinclair Thomson in the years after his conversion.

The error which he now believed he had found in the teaching of his Kirk on the communion question upset Thomson's faith in the Kirk as a whole. If they could be wrong in one point, they could be wrong in many others. From an examination of his beliefs, he proceeded to an examination of his heart before God. We should note that God can use any part of his Word, or an explanation of any doctrine, to awaken sinners and provoke them to seek him. This was Thomson's confession:

I see that I have been wrong in my motives and in my practice, in all religious duties heretofore; what if I have been wrong with regard to my spiritual state also? I find that I have taken too much for granted which I have heard from the ministers. My late discoveries show that there is none who teacheth like God . . . I will now, with his help, examine his book, that I may find out the true state of my soul.

He thus began to read the Word with this spirit. The Gospel of Matthew was his starting point. Soon he was gripped by the moral law as expounded by Christ in the sermon on the mount. Sin and condemnation became terrible realities. Outward reformation, including the instituting of family worship, resulted. But all this did not bring salvation, until one day, by the sovereign grace of God, he came to see that his hopes must rest on Christ alone. In his case, as in many genuine conversions, a period of deep conviction of sin preceded assurance.

Early ministry

As Sinclair Thomson's awakening was through a book, so his first experience of preaching was brought about by a book—or the absence of it. The book was a book of sermons from which Thomson had begun to publicly read in the Kirk on the Sabbaths when the resident minister was absent. The rules allowed only for the parish schoolmaster to carry out this duty, and the schoolmaster turned out to be one of the few godly folk in the area. He and Thomson took turns at reading—the latter on an unauthorised basis. It soon became clear that it was the sermon-reading of the crofter which had the unction of God upon it. Then a problem arose. The Kirk suddenly produced the weapon of discipline! While smugglers could remain in good standing in the Kirk and even lead the singing, unauthorised "readers" could not. A letter was received by Thomsom from the minister informing him that since he had taken upon himself the office of preacher, he would be relieved of the lesser office of

precentor. Both his preaching and his precenting were under the ban. In this way Thomson was gradually being pushed out of the Parish Kirk. He still attended when there was a service, but the people were pressing him to read evangelical sermons to them at home meetings. This he agreed to do and continued for several weeks until one Sunday, when Thomson went to get his book of sermons, he found it missing. He had lent it and forgotten to see that it was returned. Now he was in a dilemma. The people were already waiting in the room. He went in, rather anxious about the outcome, and read the Scriptures. After explaining what had happened he ventured on a few words of explanation of the passage. Before he knew it, he was expounding. As the folk left at the end they begged him to continue to instruct them in this way and always to forget the book of sermons. This outward call only one year after his conversion, confirmed by an inward sense of calling, and by the providence of God, combined to make this the initiation of a fifty year preaching ministry. Evidently a break was now made with the established Church. A group of people was quite ready to stand with Thomson. Eight had been called by grace under his ministry. For some time they looked into the Word together and concluded that it was right to form an independent congregation of believers. On the days when there was a service in the Parish Kirk only about a dozen gathered to hear Thomson expound, but numbers on the other Sundays grew substantially. A place of worship had to be found. An old store, formerly used for housing fishing materials, was renovated and in 1810 was set apart for the worship of Almighty God. The church formed was not as yet a Baptist church. It identified itself with the Independent Church in Lerwick, which, like the national Kirk, practised infant baptism, though unlike the national Kirk it aimed to have only regenerate people in the membership. On the first Sunday after the opening of the "reformed" store the Parish minister was away and at least 500 people gathered to hear Thomson. The store turned out to be of little use. As Thomson preached to this crowd of people in the open air, several were savingly awakened.

Doctrine

It is important, before going any further in the story, to be clear about the doctrinal position held by Thomson throughout his life. On the matter of baptism he changed his views, but on many other parts of theology he remained constant. A letter he wrote in 1845, when he was sixty-one years of age, illustrates well what doctrines he held dear. The letter refers to a book on the atonement written by Dr Wardlaw. This work advocated the view that Christ died for all men. Thomson wrote:

> The Doctors' theory of the universality of the atonement has run like wild-fire through the length and breadth of the land, until it is as rare, now, to hear the doctrines of grace drop from the lips of a preacher as it would have been, thirty years ago, to hear the reverse. All parties are more or less tinctured with it—I mean in every country in

Britain—with the exception of the "Close-Communion Baptists"; and as the few Baptists in Shetland are providentially of that denomination, they have as yet been graciously sheltered from that delusion.

This proves beyond doubt that Thomson's theology was thoroughly Calvinistic. There was Arminian preaching to be found among the Methodists in the Shetlands, and this Thomson vigorously opposed. This is how he expressed himself in referring to Methodist theology:

The Arminian doctrine plainly amounts to this: the sinner must begin with God, and if he does, God will be sure to follow up his—the sinner's—commencement. At other times it speaks the very reverse, namely, that God has already begun with every sinner upon the face of the earth, but that in the greatest number of cases the sinner will not end in his conversion, and he perishes, and the purposes of God are frustrated . . . A careful perusal of the first chapter to the Ephesians will show the origin of all the real conversions that have taken place, or ever shall take place upon the earth.

When we read such statements we must remember that Thomson's theology and ability to define differences like this, was gained almost entirely through his own private study of the Scriptures. He had no formal theological training, such as is sometimes urged upon us today as being absolutely necessary for a minister of the gospel. The men of that time who had the training were the men in the Establishment, through whom few were being born again. But we must not imagine that Sinclair Thomson was complacent about his lack of education. When he first began in the ministry he could hardly write or spell. Accordingly he set himself to study, while still crofting and fishing for his livelihood. Instead of rising between 4 and 5 a.m. which had been his custom, he began to get up between 2 and 3 a.m. Since Shetland is so far north—the northern extremity of Britain—the nights are very short in the summer months, and it may be that he made good use of the daylight. At any rate, these "hours stolen from sleep" as he calls them, were devoted to the Scriptures and to general education. Thus he became equipped to preach four or five times a week for the rest of his life, in almost every part of the islands.

A tract published by Thomson in 1844 shows that he was thoroughly aware of the arguments propounded by paedo-baptists in defence of their theology of infant baptism. The tract is entitled *Upon the Popular Assertion that Baptism came in the room of Circumcision*, and in it he argues that since both baptism and circumcision were carried on in the days of the Apostles and no contradiction was seen in this, evidently baptism was not seen as replacing circumcision. When the Jerusalem Council was convened to consider whether Gentiles should be circumcised, no appeal was made to the fact that baptism had replaced circumcision. Yet this would have been the obvious argument. Circumcision, says Thomson, in a fine statement, "wherever it had any special reference to any thing in connection with the New Dispensation pointed directly to the circumcision of the *heart*, or new creation in Christ Jesus."

Baptism

But we are jumping the gun, and must relate baptism to Thomson's theological pilgrimage. Having satisfied himself that the Scriptures gave him warrant to establish a church of believers separate from the nominally Christian Establishment, Sinclair Thomson turned his enquiring mind to this matter of baptism. He agreed with the Independents in church government that churches should be independent and that the only offices should be those of pastors and deacons. But he had a nagging suspicion that the Independents had not gone far enough in studying New Testament baptism. He writes:

Ever since I had come under the impression that the New Testament ought to be the particular guide of the church, in its formation and practice, I suspected that she had lost her way in the matter of Christian baptism. When, or how, I could not tell, as I was unacquainted with her history.

He could not evade the force of the command, "Repent and be baptised." Repentance and faith, in the New Testament, always preceded baptism. He had been "baptised" as an infant, when he had neither. This, he concluded, must be sinful. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." When he mentioned these questionings to the Independent Church in Lerwick, they took offence—perhaps a sign that they were uneasy themselves. Thomson was confused. Those whom he most respected disagreed strongly with the way he was thinking.

Then, at one of the several interviews with the Lerwick Independent Pastor, the fact emerged that there were people called Baptists who did baptise believers, by immersing them in water. Thomson was most encouraged and resolved to contact these men in Edinburgh. This was the period of the preaching of Robert and James Haldane, who furthered immensely the Calvinistic Baptist cause in Scotland. At about the same time, Thomson obtained a copy of a book by Mr Innes, one of the Edinburgh Baptist ministers, in which he found manna for his soul. This, he says, was "the most acceptable uninspired volume ever put into my hands". Wasting no time, he wrote to this pastor and asked if it would be possible for anyone to come to Shetland to baptise one candidate. The distance was 300 miles, on dangerous seas, and the answer was no! But Innes did promise that if Thomson could get to Edinburgh his fare would be paid and he could be baptised there. In the light of this, he set off in the summer of 1814, but foul weather meant that after several false starts and a number of wasted days at sea, the old fishing boat was driven back to Lerwick. Winter then came in and the idea had to be abandoned.

Thomson concluded that God had other, better plans for his baptism. The paedo-baptists proclaimed loudly that his intentions were not according to God's will at all. In the next year, 1815, Daniel Bain, a minister from the Haldanes' church in Edinburgh, arrived at Sinclair

Thomson's door. He was a Shetlander, had been converted when away in the army, and was now re-visiting his old home. On arrival in Lerwick he had been told about Thomson and sought him out to encourage him in the faith. He found he had more than that to do—he had a baptism to undertake, the first ever in Shetland. It took place in the Loch of Spiggie, near Thomson's own croft. Over 600 people gathered in the utmost solemnity and reverence to witness the impressive gospel ordinance as Daniel Bain led Sinclair Thomson into the loch and immersed him in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The effect was immediate; an effect which there could never have been if Thomson had been baptised away in Edinburgh. Bibles began to be searched on the subject of baptism. Over the next few weeks Thomson baptised twenty-three people on profession of faith. The Independent church in Lerwick announced that it was no longer in fellowship with the group in Spiggie, but no-one was deterred and the group was organised as a Baptist Church with twenty-four members. Thomson relates the subsequent calling of himself to the pastorate of the church:

> About one week after we had thus become a church, our brethren decided to organise after the scriptural order. They also chose me as their pastor. As we were beyond the reach of preaching brethren who would ordain me by the laying on of hands, we agreed to proceed with the ordination after the following simple manner: A day was appointed for humiliation and prayer, in connection with fasting. After the preliminary exercises, a brother arose, and in the name of the church desired me to take the oversight of them in the name of the Lord. Then he sat down. I stood up and said that before I could make any response to the request thus made, I wished to ascertain whether the desire thus uttered was the unanimous sentiment of the church. As a test, therefore, I requested as many as sincerely wished that I should become their pastor, to hold up their right hands. Every right hand was immediately raised. I then signified to them my acceptance of the call, and addressed them upon the solemn nature of the connection now formed between us.

This took place in 1815. Thomson remained the pastor of this same church for the next forty-six years, until his death.

Churches

Early on an extension preaching centre was established by Thomson at a place called Lunnasting, about 45 miles from his home. By 1856 he could record that he had preached there 1,000 times, doing the return journeys on foot, often in bitter cold and buffeted by gales of wind.

Another preaching centre was Burra Isle, which had to be reached by rowing boat. Today there is a bridge system which links it with the main island of Shetland, but having done the crossing by rowing boat myself, I can vouch for the fact that it was no small feat for Sinclair Thomson to continue to do expeditions of this kind right up to the end of his life. At the same time, for most of these years, he was supporting his family by farming and fishing. It is salutary to compare our own softness in this generation, when people are loath to walk even a mile, let alone forty, with the endurance and staying power shown by this "apostle".

A church was established in Burra Isle and John Inkster became the second Baptist pastor in Shetland. There was hostility to the Baptists in Burra, as there was in most places. Four common accusations were made against them. 1. They believed immersion was essential for salvation. 2. They had abandoned the Old Testament. 3. They believed only Baptists were Christians. 4. They stole members from other churches. It was the last point which became a source of controversy in Burra. Two of the early members of the Baptist church there had been Methodists, and a local Methodist leader preached against their baptism, asking for a public disputation on the subject. Instead of this, Thomson offered the Methodist the use of the Baptist pulpit to put forward his views. He promised that they would be attentively listened to. This generous offer was not taken up, the Methodist possibly thinking that he would be forced to reciprocate and thus might lose even more of his congregation! The church survived these controversies and there is still a Baptist church in Burra today.

Chapels were also built, as churches were established, at Sandsting, Scalloway—the second largest town after Lerwick—and a group of islands called the Skerries. These churches were all founded through Thomson's own labours and by the end of his life the number of Baptists in the islands was between four and five hundred. In order to raise funds for chapel building, Thomson made several visits to the south of Scotland and to London. He contacted leading men of the Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists of the day. It is worth emphasising that though he was probably the most isolated geographically of any of his own denomination in the British Isles, he did not use this reason for having no fellowship with them, but went out of his way to associate with the brethren. A previous quotation showed that he believed it "providential" that the Shetland Baptists were in the "Closed-communion" group of Baptists, since these were not infected by Arminian doctrine. In fact, typical of the man, he had come through his own reading to believe that the Lord's table should be restricted to those who had been baptised as believers. It was only later that the Shetland churches became aware of the controversies about this. He became convinced, he says, that "baptism is before the Lord's supper". In practice it would anyway have been most unusual for someone from the Methodist, Presbyterian or Independent churches to wish to go to any of the Baptist communion services. Most were so opposed to believers' baptism. When the debate about open and closed communion came to the attention of the Shetland Baptists, the arguments for an open communion did not attract them. Their adherence to believers' baptism had cost them a great deal. They were hardly likely to regard it as a matter of indifference. It would be a mistake to imagine that because of his church views Sinclair Thomson was sectarian. Evangelicals from outside his own denomination supported his work. For the building of the Skerries Chapel, funds were given by Dr Candlish of the

Free Church (Presbyterian) of Scotland. Despite his frequent evangelistic forays to all parts of Shetland, Thomson never fell into the trap of neglecting the home congregation of which he was a pastor. The Spiggie church continued to prosper and a new chapel was built, more centrally situated in the parish of Dunrossness. A congregation still gathers in this chapel.

The last building to come into use as a Baptist church was purchased by auction for the use of the Lerwick Baptists. Thomson, at the age of 79, showing the wear and tear of his years, but still alert and purposeful, bid for the building against a young Catholic priest. All other bidders had dropped out and finally the priest, seeing how determined his rival was, dropped out as well. Thomson did not have the money to pay for the place and was too old to travel south again to raise it. Instead he wrote to the Baptist Churches at large recounting the history of the churches in Shetland and the existing needs. Through this means, the money was raised and Sinclair Thomson died knowing that no debts remained.

He continued preaching and even travelling right up to his last year. On his final appearance in the pulpit at Dunrossness he preached on Psalm 63: 2: "To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." His daughter Barbara, wife of Gavin Mouat, who shared the ministry at Dunrossness for thirty-five years with Thomson, records a brief impression:

Although so very sick and feeble, that it was with difficulty he could remain in a standing position, yet it was generally remarked that his sermon was a powerful one, in every part.

All the evidence about Sinclair Thomson's preaching points to the fact that it was powerful, attractive, accurate and sound in doctrine. Subsequent to his last sermon, he could only watch from his window as his people went to worship. On the morning of his death, sensing that his time on earth had come to an end, he said goodbye to all his friends and family. Two sons and three daughters survived him. He is buried near the church in Dunrossness.

Since Sinclair Thomson's death the Baptist cause in Shetland has not flourished to the same extent. The churches are now General Baptist.

As industry develops in the area after years of stagnation, there is a need for the powerful preaching and determined persevering witness that characterized Thomson. Could it happen today?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My main source for this article is *The Shetland Apostle* by J. A. Smith, first published in 1867, reprinted in 1969 by the Lerwick Baptist Church.

The Church Constitution

NEWLY-FORMED CHURCHES REQUIRE A CONSTITUTION AND THE ONE published in this issue of *Reformation Today* is a constitution at present being contemplated by young churches. It is based upon other constitutions which have already been adopted and found satisfactory by churches of like mind.

1. The fall of man

The points of doctrine outlined form a summary of belief required for young believers. The way in which the section describing the fall of man is worded is designed to combat the Arminianism rife today. Man's inability and responsibility are clearly stated, avoiding the equal pitfalls of fatalism on the one hand, shallow views of man on the other.

2. The use of the word sacrament

The Westminster Larger Catechism defines the word as follows: "A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his Church, to signify, seal, and exhibit to those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation, to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces, to oblige them to obedience, to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another, and to distinguish them from those that are without." By this definition there can be only two sacraments, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The word "ordinance" is inadequate as this term can be used to describe preaching. The word "sacrament" is derived from the Latin *sacramentum*—an oath. A sacrament denotes an outward, sensible sign of an inward, spiritual grace possessed by the recipient. An ordinance does not carry this connotation and therefore is not an adequate expression for either baptism or the Lord's Supper. The objection is made that the abuse of the word through Roman Catholic practice makes it unsuitable. We should not allow ourselves to sacrifice perfectly good expressions because of the abuse of them by others. This is a defensive attitude and ours should be one which is positive and which takes the initiative.

3. Resignation from membership
It is commonplace today for some professing Christians to drift into a wilderness or 'no man's land'—that is, into a position of doing nothing. Some profess to be evangelical but seldom attend any church or contribute to the Lord's work in any realistic way. How did they manage to get into this position? The constitution which follows seeks to safeguard against this common tendency. Several Scriptures could be quoted in support of the contention that it is not possible to resign from the Body of Christ, which Body is represented by his local churches upon earth. John 15:1-10 is an example of a Scripture which could be quoted.

4. Scripture references
Only a few Scripture references have been inserted. It is possible for a constitution to become a mass of figures so bewildering for multitude that it is unlikely that they will ever be used. A few textual references here and there in the vital and needful places are better. A separate list can be kept should there be inquiry.

5. Eldership
Those unaccustomed to the emphasis that the New Testament places on eldership might feel too great a prominence given to this subject, but it ought to be noted that submission is required by the elders themselves to prevent autocracy, and it also is self-evident that elders can only lead while they govern as true and helpful under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

6. The Communion Table
The difficulty that Baptists experience is in the area of new converts who must submit themselves to baptism and the requirements of church membership before they come to the Communion Table. When such converts who submit themselves to these Scriptural requirements observe others sailing past them to the Communion Table, who themselves have not submitted to these disciplines, there is naturally an objection and a stumbling-block. The constitution safeguards this by requiring that visitors must be in good standing with a properly constituted Christian church. Moreover, only visitors may come to the Communion Table on this basis. If they settle in the area they must submit themselves to the church order of the church where they desire to take the Communion and if they are not willing to do this, it is altogether reasonable to suggest that they join a church of Paedobaptist conviction.

7. A constitution for robust believers
Compared with the weak and slack standards of our day this constitution requires realistic discipleship. Allowance ought to be made for the weak for the Scripture says, "support the weak" (1 Thess. 5:14). It does not say, "support the lazy and slothful". Discernment will be needed to distinguish between the two.

A PROPOSED CONSTITUTION AS FOLLOWS:

1 DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

A local church is a fellowship of born-again followers of Jesus Christ whose profession of faith shows itself in holy living and good works.
A local church may be recognized where:

The whole of God's Word is preached and practised;
The two sacraments established by Christ's authority, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper, are correctly administered; and
The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is seen in scriptural church government through the rule of elders.

The purpose of the local church is:

To provide for the united worship of God in prayer and praise;
To provide for the nurture of God's people through teaching and pastoral care;
To be God's instrument in gathering in his elect through the preaching of the Gospel; and
To be salt and light in the unbelieving world.

2 SUMMARY OF OUR FAITH

The church adopts as a summary of our faith the 1689 "London Confession of Faith", as republished in 1974 under the title "A Faith to Confess". This confession of faith gives a concise statement of biblical doctrine. In no way is it equal to the infallible authority of the Word of God. A brief summary of what we believe follows:

The Scriptures

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and are the infallible and authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

Doctrine of God

The Trinity. There is but one God, the Maker, Preserver, and Ruler of all things, having in and of himself all perfections, and being infinite in them all. To him all creatures owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.

God is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

Creation. God created all things from nothing. Adam and Eve were created by God after his own image in perfect righteousness. The account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 is historical, not mythical: hence evolution is a theory contrary to Scripture's teaching on creation.

Providence. God from eternity decreed all things that come to pass, and perpetually governs all creatures and events. However, he is not in any

way the author or approver of sin, nor does he destroy the responsibility of intelligent creatures.

The Fall of Man

That sinful condition into which man fell consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the lack of that righteousness in which he was created, and the corruption of his nature whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually, which is commonly called Original Sin, and from which all transgressions proceed. Therefore, although completely responsible to do so, man is unable of himself to repent of sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

God's Grace and our Salvation

The Mediator. Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the divinely appointed Mediator between God and man. Having taken upon himself human nature, yet without sin, he perfectly fulfilled the law, suffered, and died upon the cross for the salvation of sinners. He was buried, rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, at whose right hand he ever lives to make intercession for his people. He is the only Mediator, the Prophet, Priest and King of the church, and Sovereign of the universe.

Election. Election is God's eternal choice of some persons to eternal life —not because of foreseen merit or faith in them, but because of his mercy in Christ. Those who have been predestined to be saved are called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

Regeneration and Calling. Regeneration is the implanting of a new heart by the Holy Spirit. God calls us into fellowship with Jesus Christ by his Word and his Holy Spirit, our minds being spiritually enlightened and our wills and affections being renewed.

Repentance. Repentance is a saving grace. The repentant person, by the Holy Spirit, is convicted of the evil of his sin and humbles himself for it, with godly sorrow, hatred of it, self-abhorrence, and a purpose to endeavour to walk before God so as to please him in all things.

Faith. Faith is a saving grace by which we receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation as he is freely offered to us in the Gospel.

Justification and Adoption. Justification is an act of God's free grace whereby he pardons our sins and accounts us righteous. This is not based on anything we have done but only on the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. Once justified we are adopted into the family of God.

Sanctification. Those who are united to Jesus Christ are renewed in their whole nature after the image of God. It is a progressive work of the Holy Spirit who dwells in all believers. They are thus enabled to pursue

a life of holiness in obedience to all the commands of Christ, though never attaining to perfection in this life.

Perseverance. Those whom God has accepted in the Beloved and sanctified by his Spirit will never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace but will persevere to the end.

The Church

The Lord Jesus is the Head of the church which is composed of God's elect in every age. According to his commandment, Christians are to gather in local churches. To each of these churches he has given authority for administering order, discipline, and worship. The officers of a church are elders and deacons.

Baptism. Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus obligatory on every believer, in which he is immersed in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of his union with Christ in his death and resurrection, of remission of sins, and of his giving himself to God to walk in newness of life. It is prerequisite to church membership.
The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of Jesus Christ, to be administered with the elements of bread and wine, and to be observed by his Church until he returns. It is in no sense a sacrifice or a means of having sins cleansed. Its purpose is to commemorate Christ's death, to confirm the faith and other graces of Christians, and to be a bond, and a renewal of their communion, with Christ and their fellow believers.

Evangelism and Missions. It is the duty of every church and every Christian to extend the Gospel to all men everywhere. As faith comes by hearing the Word of God, we are to seek by all methods sanctioned in the Word of God to persuade men to seek Jesus Christ and his salvation. Whereas the apostles were extraordinary officers of Christ and endowed with supernatural gifts for the establishment of the Church, elders, being the ordinary officers of Christ until the end of time, are to rely on preaching and teaching for the discipling of the nations.

The Christian Life

The Law of God. God has commanded us to love him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves. The Christian's guide is laid down in his law, especially in the Ten Commandments.

The Lord's Day. The Lord's Day is to be kept holy. It is given for our benefit, which we obtain through resting from normal occupations and by giving ourselves to the worship and service of God. To neglect public worship for the pursuit of worldly pleasure or gain is a sin.

The State. Civil government is ordained of God and it is the duty of Christians to obey those who have the rule over them in all matters

consistent with the teaching of Scripture. Christians are also to pray for their rulers.

Things To Come

The Return of Christ. We believe in the visible, personal and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Resurrection. The bodies of men after death return to dust but their spirits return immediately to God—the righteous to rest with him, the wicked to be reserved under darkness until the judgment. The bodies of all the dead, both just and unjust, will be raised.

The Judgment. God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by Jesus Christ, when everyone shall receive according to his deeds. The wicked will go into everlasting punishment in hell with the devil and his angels. The righteous, with glorified bodies, will live and reign with Christ for ever.

3 CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Eligibility

The qualifications for membership are:

Profession of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Evidence that this profession is genuine seen in 1. A scriptural experience of conversion. 2. A belief of the truths summarised herein. 3. Evidence in practice of consistent Christian living.

Baptism by immersion following repentance and faith.

Willing submission to the teaching and government of the church.

Applicants must have been in regular attendance at the services. No one may be received automatically by transfer from another church. Applicants may not be members of a secret society such as the Freemasons. No one may apply for baptism apart from the consideration of church membership.

Procedure

At least two elders will interview the applicant and will report to the eldership as a whole. Applicants recommended for membership will be asked to give to the church a short account of their faith.

The application will then be left in abeyance for two weeks, to allow members to fulfil their duty of making known to the elders any information which throws light on the application. If there is no serious objection in the opinion of the elders, baptism and membership will proceed as soon as possible at the end of the two-week period.

Responsibilities and Privileges

Members are expected to be present regularly at services for public worship especially the two Sunday services, the Lord's Table, one of the prayer meetings, and church meetings. Attendance is not only a duty

but a privilege given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:25, Acts 2:42).

The responsibility of praying together with other members of the church on a regular basis must be clearly established for membership to be a reality.

Regular proportionate giving according to our means is part of what God requires of true worshippers. Tithing of one's substance is commended. (The attention of members is drawn to the advantages of covenant giving.) (1 Cor. 16:2, 2 Cor. 9:6-7, Mal. 3:8-11.)

Elders, being ordained by the Holy Spirit to rule and pastor the flock of Jesus Christ, are to be honoured and the flock are to submit to their spiritual authority. Members are to pray particularly for elders and deacons in the discharge of their duties. (1 Thess. 5:12-13, Heb. 13:17, 1 Pet. 5:1-4, Acts 20:28.)

Members should seek to avoid all causes of division in the body and strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. All members are to discern their place in the body of Christ and in honour prefer one another. (Rom. 2:10, Eph. 4:1-3, 1 Cor. 12:11 ff.)

Members are to work and pray zealously for the welfare and the coming of the kingdom of God and seek by all possible means to promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Members should undertake all their Christian service in fellowship with the church and under the guidance of the elders.

Those members who are compelled to be away for sustained periods must, in order to maintain their membership, keep regular personal contact with the elders or members delegated by them.

Members are to promote holiness, edification and love among themselves by praying for one another, by provoking one another to love and good works, by admonishing one another, by showing hospitality, by bearing one another's burdens.

The behaviour of believers in the community must be consistent with scriptural precepts. (Tit. 2:5, 8, 1 Thess. 5:22, 1 Pet. 2:12-13.)

The "unequal yoke" being forbidden by Scripture (2 Cor. 6:14), members may not marry an unbeliever, and therefore may not court such. Those converted subsequent to marriage should remain with their partners and pray for their salvation. Scripture recognises adultery as the only ground for dissolving the marriage union (Matt. 5:32, 19:9). In the family the husband is the head of the wife and the parents the head of the children. Husbands must love and care for, as well as rule, their wives and children. Wives are to obey their husbands in all things. Parents are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Church Discipline

Discipline arises out of the responsibilities of church membership. Its purpose is to uphold the glory and rule of the Lord Jesus Christ in his church, to maintain its purity here on earth, to sanctify each member, and to reclaim and restore those who err.

How it is to be administered

Any action is to be carried out in the spirit of Christian love and humility. It may involve anguish of heart and many tears (2 Cor. 2:4). Matters of personal offence should be settled by members according to the procedure laid down in Matt. 18:15-18.

Any member who wilfully neglects the responsibilities of church membership, who falls into doctrinal error or into open sin will be subject to the discipline of the church as exercised by the elders. Disciplinary action may take three forms according to the seriousness of the case:

1. Admonition and rebuke, either private or public.

2. Suspension from membership, in which case the member may not partake of the Lord's Supper, attend church meetings, or undertake any service in the church. He will be encouraged to attend the preaching services. Suspension may be for a stated period or indefinitely. If there is evidence of repentance then forgiveness and restoration to membership will be granted.

3. Exclusion from membership. If there is no evidence of repentance the elders will recommend to the church that the offender's name be removed from the membership.
   The church should pray for the repentance and reconciliation of those under discipline.

In some cases great discretion is required and therefore the elders are not obliged to give the church all the details but must be trusted with the government of the church (Heb. 13:17). At church meetings on these matters the elders will inform the church of their proposed action, and will invite members to approach them to gain further information or make their opinions known.

Termination of Membership

Membership can be terminated only by disciplinary action or by integration with another church. Membership cannot be terminated by the resignation of the member concerned.

Members should not move from the area for personal advantage at the expense of their spiritual welfare.

4 GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

The Lord Jesus Christ is the sole King of his people. He governs his church by the Word of God. His government is exercised in particular churches through elders who apply the Word of God by their teaching and ruling. Deacons care for the administrative and practical affairs of the church. A church, therefore, is comprised of a company of believers, some of whom are acknowledged as elders, others as deacons. Elders and members commit themselves to each other in a loving and permanent bond.

All elders, deacons, and any who have a teaching function in the church must subscribe wholeheartedly to the confession of faith and constitution of the church.

Eldership

The qualifications for eldership are revealed in the Word of God, in particular in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Such passages are the guide to recognizing elders. They are to be read out and explained to the church whenever someone is being considered for eldership.

Elders are subject to each other, none having superior authority.

Appointment

The Triune God is alone able to raise up men for the office of eldership. It is the duty of the church to recognize the work of God in equipping potential elders with the necessary graces and abilities.

The existing elders shall recognize those who are already functioning in the use of their gifts and bring such before the church for recognition. A month shall be left for objections to be raised and questions to be asked. An 80 per cent. majority vote shall be required to confirm the elders' recommendation, but unanimity is to be regarded as the aim. The appointment of the elder shall then be publicly ratified and he will be set apart for his duties by the prayer of the whole church.

The church shall be responsible to provide for the support of an elder or elders set aside to devote themselves to the ministry (1 Tim. 5:17-18, 1 Cor. 9:9, 14). Provision should be made for their retirement.

An elder may be removed from office should he neglect his duty, be guilty of sinful behaviour, fall into error, or hold views contrary to our confession and constitution. If an accusation is made against an elder the directions of 1 Tim. 5:19-21 are to be followed. The other elders are to approach the matter with great caution, firmness and impartiality.

An elder unable to fulfil his commitments should relinquish his office. Just as men grow in gifts and abilities with respect to eldership, so decline through old age may render a man incapable of fulfilling his office. Such retirement must be ratified by the church.

An elder is not free, on his own initiative, or for his own ends, to forsake the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made him an elder. Whether or not receiving financial support from the church, he must not court or accept an invitation from another church to join it and should make known to the other elders any such approach by another church. The church may send out elders if church-planting is contemplated, providing an adequate plurality of elders is left. Elders (or deacons) should not extend their activities without prior consultation with the eldership.

Functions

The function of the elders is to exercise shepherd-like care over the flock.

This involves:

Giving themselves to prayer, the ministry of the Word and the nurture of souls.

Regulating all gatherings for public worship.

Interviewing applicants for membership and maintaining discipline.

Administering the sacraments and supervising admission to the Lord's Table.

Recommending to the church additional elders or deacons.

Leading and overseeing the church in all its ministries and functions, including local evangelism.

Deacons

The qualifications for deacons are also laid down in the Word of God, particularly in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. As with elders this passage is to be read out and explained to the church whenever anyone is being considered for deaconing.

Appointment

As with eldership, deaconing is a gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to his church. Appointment to this office is to be carried out in the same manner as appointment to eldership. The same directions apply to removal from office. Deacons shall occupy their office only as long as they are able to fulfil their duties.

Functions

Deacons are called:

To relieve the elders so that they are able to exercise oversight of the flock.

To administer the business and practical affairs of the church. All accounts are to be properly audited in accordance with the law of the land.

To a ministry of mercy towards those in physical need, especially in the church.

To maintain the church premises.

5 THE SACRAMENTS

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two sacraments.
Baptism by immersion is to be administered only to those believers who are becoming members of the church or some other gospel church.
The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated weekly or as often as is considered advisable. Those eligible to commune at the Lord's Table are believers who have been baptized by immersion and who evidence a consistent life. While no unbaptized person can be a regular communicant, the elders can admit to the Lord's Table an unbaptized visitor who is a consistent member of a properly constituted gospel church. No one may be invited to the Table without the knowledge of the elders.

6 CHURCH MEETINGS

The Lord is present in power at the gathering together of the church and therefore all meetings should be carried out in a spirit of worship and unity. The elders should summon the church for all matters of importance, such as the appointment of officers, receiving members, matters of discipline and expulsion, the settling of doctrine, the consideration of sending missionaries, and major practical matters.

Every church meeting shall begin and end with prayer.
Members shall speak standing, and once on the same subject, unless they are required to explain the matter further.

Nothing shall be brought before the church at church meetings except through the eldership.

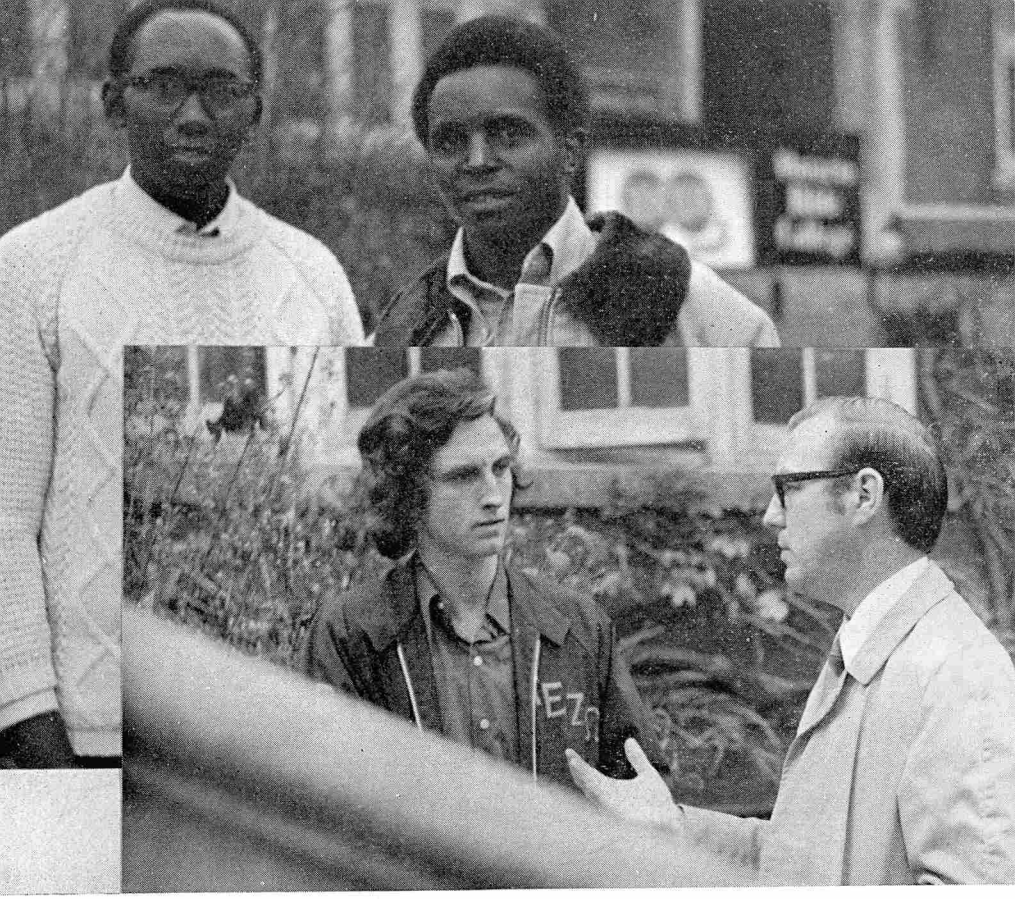
The meetings of the church are confidential. Members are therefore permitted to speak of these matters only to fellow-members. Anyone who breaks this trust will be subject to discipline.

All the business and activities of the church are to be reviewed at an Annual General Meeting. This is to be held as early as possible in the year when all financial accounts are to be presented to the church. This meeting is distinct from meetings for discipline and admission to membership.
The elders call all meetings of the church. They will give at least ten days notice of any church meeting, except in an emergency. They will also appoint a chairman for all meetings.

While the A.G.M. and other meetings are strictly private, the elders may allow others to hear the testimony of applicants for membership.
An appointed secretary shall keep minutes of the meetings held. These shall be approved at the A.G.M.
When the elders deem it necessary a vote will be taken.

7 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

Any amendments to the constitution will be made only by an 80 per cent. majority vote at an A.G.M. A minimum of 50 per cent. of the members must be present for the vote to be valid. All members must be circulated with the proposed amendment at least two weeks before the meeting.



See page one for explanation of photos.

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